

3 a file store configured to store a range of audio/video
4 products in respective product files;

5 a dialogue unit operable to invite and receive a client
6 selection from among the products;

7 a product reader connected to read the product files from the
8 file store to generate a digital audio/video signal; and

9 a signal processing unit having an input selectively
10 connectable to receive the digital audio/video signal from the
11 product reader, a processing core operable to apply a defined level
12 of content degradation to the digital audio/video signal creating a
13 degraded digital audio/video signal having a degradation in
14 perceived quality corresponding to the defined level of content
15 degradation, and an output connected to output the degraded digital
16 audio/video signal.

1 2. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the dialogue
2 unit is operable to generate a degrade level signal, the signal
3 processing unit having a degrade level signal input for receiving a
4 degrade level signal from the dialogue unit.

1 7. (Amended) A server according to claim 5, the digital signal
2 processor including:

3 a discrete Fourier transform unit operable to apply a discrete
4 Fourier transform to obtain a frequency domain representation of
5 the digital audio/video signal;

6 a frequency modulator operable to apply a manipulation process
7 to the frequency domain representation of the digital audio/video
8 signal;

9 an inverse discrete Fourier transform unit operable to apply
10 an inverse discrete Fourier transform to reconstruct a time domain
11 representation of the digital audio/video signal;

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12 wherein the manipulation process applied by the frequency
13 modulator is such as to effect a degradation of perceived signal
14 quality in the digital audio/video signal reconstructed by the
15 inverse digital Fourier transform unit.

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1 9. (Amended) A server according to claim 7, wherein the
2 manipulation process includes one or more of the following:
3 frequency band rejections, frequency low pass and frequency high
4 pass.

1 10. (Amended) A server according to claim 7, wherein the
2 manipulation process includes phase inversion over at least one
3 range of frequency components.

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1 16. (Amended) A server according to claim 15, wherein the digital
2 signal processor is configured to process digital video signals
3 conforming to an MPEG standard including as frame types I-frames,
4 P-frames and B-frames, wherein the frame manipulator is operable to
5 identify the frame type of frames held in the frame buffer, and
6 operable to perform frame manipulation according to frame type so
as to effect a degradation of perceived video signal quality.

1 17. (Amended) A server according to claim 15, wherein the digital
2 signal processor is configured to process digital video signals
3 conforming to an MPEG standard including data blocks, each
4 comprising a plurality of pixels, wherein the frame manipulator is
5 operable to vary the pixels of the data blocks of at least selected
6 ones of the frames so as to effect a degradation of perceived video
7 signal quality.

1 18. (Amended) A server according to claim 15, wherein the digital
2 signal processor is configured to process digital video signals
3 conforming to an MPEG standard including motion vectors, wherein
4 the frame manipulator is operable to vary the motion vectors of at
5 least selected ones of the frames so as to effect a degradation of
6 perceived video signal quality.

1 19. (Amended) A server according to claim 15, wherein the digital
2 signal processor is configured to process digital video signals
3 conforming to an MPEG standard including objects, wherein the frame
4 manipulator is operable to manipulate the objects of at least
5 selected ones of the frames so as to effect a degradation of
6 perceived video signal quality.

1 20. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the
2 processing core is operable to process a multi-channel digital
3 audio signal by switching individual channels within the multi-
4 channel signal to apply spatial modification to the digital audio
5 signal so as to effect a degradation of perceived digital audio
6 signal quality.

1 21. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the
2 processing core is operable to process a multi-channel digital
3 audio signal by inverting the phase of at least one of the audio
4 channels so as to effect a degradation of perceived digital audio
5 signal quality.

1 22. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the
2 processing core is operable to process a multi-channel digital
3 audio/video signal by adding together individual ones of the
4 channels so as to effect a degradation of perceived digital
5 audio/video signal quality.

1 23. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the
2 processing core is operable to process a multi-channel digital
3 audio/video signal by removal or attenuation of at least one of the
4 channels so as to effect a degradation of perceived digital
5 audio/video signal quality.

1 24. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the digital
2 audio/video signal comprises an n-bit digital audio signal and the
3 processing core is operable to convert the n-bit digital audio
4 signal into an m-bit digital audio signal where m is less than n so
5 as to effect a degradation of perceived digital audio signal
6 quality.

1 25. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the
2 processing core is operable to time modulate the digital
3 audio/video signal so as to effect a degradation of perceived
4 digital audio signal quality.

1 27. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the
2 processing core comprises:
3 a first data converter arranged as an input stage to convert
4 the digital audio/video signal into an analog audio/video signal;
5 an analog processing unit operable to apply a defined level of
6 audio/video degradation to the analog signal creating a degraded
7 analog audio signal having a degradation in perceived quality
8 corresponding to said defined level of content degradation;
9 a second data converter arranged as an output stage to convert
10 the degraded analog signal into a degraded digital audio/video
11 signal for output.

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1 28. (Amended) A server according to claim 27, wherein the analog
2 processing unit is operable to apply frequency domain modulation to
3 an analog audio signal so as to effect a degradation of perceived
4 audio signal quality.

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1 30. (Amended) A server according to claim 1, wherein the
2 processing core comprises a mixer for adding a secondary signal to
3 the digital audio/video signal so as to effect a degradation of
4 perceived digital audio/video signal quality.

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1 34. (Amended) A server according to claim 30, wherein the dialogue
2 unit is operable to generate a degrade level signal, the signal
3 processing unit having a degrade level signal input for receiving a
4 degrade level signal from the dialogue unit and wherein the level
5 of the secondary signal mixed with the digital audio/video signal
6 is determined by the degrade level signal.

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1 35. (Amended) A method of operating a server of a merchant
2 computer system, the method comprising:
3 inviting a client to make a selection from a range of
4 audio/video products stored by the server in product files;
5 receiving a client selection for evaluation of one of the
6 products;
7 reading the selected product file to generate a digital
8 audio/video signal;
9 applying a defined level of content degradation to the digital
10 audio/video signal to generate a degraded digital audio/video
11 signal having a degradation in perceived quality corresponding to
12 said defined level of content degradation; and
13 outputting the degraded digital audio/video signal to the
14 client.

1 39. (Amended) A method of communicating between a client, server
2 and gateway on a computer network, the method comprising:

3 a) the client establishing communication with the server to
4 identify the client and a client payment instrument to the server;
5 b) the server transmitting to the client a range of
6 audio/video products for supply in return for payment;

7 c) the client transmitting to the server an evaluation
8 request for one of the products;

9 d) the server and gateway communicating to obtain payment
10 authorization for the requested product from the payment
11 instrument;

12 e) the server transmitting to the client a degraded
13 evaluation version of the selected product, the degraded evaluation
14 version of the selected product having a degraded perceived
15 quality;

16 f) the client transmitting to the server a payment decision;

17 g) the server and gateway communicating to effect payment
18 capture for the authorized payment; and

19 h) the server transmitting to the client a non-degraded
20 version of the selected product.

1 42. (Amended) A server apparatus comprising:

2 means for supplying a range of audio/video products as
3 respective digital audio/video signals;

4 means for inviting and receiving a client selection from among
5 the products via a network connection; and

6 means for processing the digital audio/video signal associated
7 with the selected product to apply a defined level of content
8 degradation thereto; and

9 means for outputting the degraded digital audio/video signal
10 to the network connection, the degraded digital audio/video signal
11 having a degraded perceived quality corresponding to the defined

12 level of content degradation, whereby a degraded version of the
13 selected product is supplied to the client.

1 43. (Amended) A merchant computer system comprising a server and a
2 client interconnectable over a network, wherein the server
3 comprises:

4 a file store configured to store a range of audio/video
5 products in respective product files;

6 a dialogue unit having a network connection and operable to
7 invite and receive a client selection from among the products via
8 the network connection;

9 a product reader connected to read the product files from the
10 file store to generate a digital audio/video signal; and

11 a signal processing unit having an input connectable to
12 receive the digital audio/video signal from the product reader, a
13 processing core operable to apply a defined level of content
14 degradation to the digital audio/video signal creating a degraded
15 digital audio/video signal having a degradation in perceived
16 quality corresponding to said defined level of content degradation,
17 and an output connected to output the degraded digital audio/video
18 signal from the processing core to the network connection.

1 46. (Amended) A method of communicating between a client, server
2 and gateway on a computer network, the method comprising:

3 a) the client establishing communication with the server to
4 identify the client;

5 b) the server transmitting to the client a range of
6 audio/video products for supply in return for payment;

7 c) the client transmitting to the server an evaluation
8 request for one of the products;

9 d) the server transmitting to the client a degraded
10 evaluation version of the selected product, the degraded evaluation